

Myths of Psychedelics vs. Facts Found by Researchers and Scientists

Luke M. Heideman

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

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Prof. Chris McCarthy

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Picture yourself in the shoes of famous actor Ben Stiller. Why? In *Entertainment Weekly's* article in response to the Netflix film *Have a Good Trip*, Omar Sanchez (2020) reflects on Ben Stiller's experience with psychedelics. He was in search for "the opening of some other form of consciousness," which resulted in Stiller being afraid and paranoid, observing his hand and "pondering what his hand was." Stiller described a realization of having no idea where he was, or what reality is. It is commonly believed amongst society that psychedelics are harmful and have no beneficial outcome. Psychedelics are generalized with the word "drug," and therefore are related to addiction and death by overdose. A common thought about psychedelics is that they generate an unproductive and lazy character. It is also believed that psychedelics cause psychosis or that you must party when taking these substances. It is understandable to believe that psychedelics have no benefits before knowing the facts; researchers and scientists have spent the last 85 years learning and discovering the beneficial uses for psychedelics. Few know that these substances are neither addictive nor deadly, and that they can boost a sense of creativity and productivity. Psychosis is also not a definite outcome of these drugs, and they are taken in many more settings than just parties. The benefits correlated with these substances could be endless and by restricting the possibilities, we may never know what they are.

You may be asking, what are psychedelics? According to *PubMed Central*, Nichols D. E. (2016) defines psychedelics as, "powerful psychoactive substances that alter perception and affect numerous cognitive processes." A few of the more commonly known psychedelics are Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), Psilocybin (Mushrooms), Ecstasy (MDMA), and Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD/acid). According to *The Past and The Future of Psychedelic Science*,

“Modern psychedelic research began when Albert Hofmann first synthesized lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25) in 1938. Five years later, he became the first person to ingest LSD” (Doblin, R. E., Christiansen, M., Jerome, L., & Burge, B., 2019). Since then, tons of research and experiments have been performed by researchers and scientists to determine the truth behind psychedelics. The affects and outcomes of these psychoactive drugs impact our brains differently but is commonly referred to as “tripping.” The effects of this so called “trip” will provide a euphoric feeling, hallucinations including sounds, sensations, or feelings, even seeing things that are not real, altering one's perception in a unique way from other drugs.

It is a common misconception that there are no healthy uses or benefits when it comes to psychedelics. This stigma can be brought upon from stories, movies, and even music, however, over the past 85 years, scientists and researchers have found psychedelics to be extremely useful in many ways. Stated by *PubMed Central*, Nichols, D. E. (2016), “Several double-blind placebo-controlled phase 2 studies of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy in patients with cancer-related psychosocial distress have demonstrated unprecedented positive relief of anxiety and depression. Two small pilot studies of psilocybin-assisted psychotherapy also have shown positive benefit in treating both alcohol and nicotine addiction.” Since the discovery of psychedelics, a lot of progress has been made revolving around them, from reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, to medically curing substance addictions like alcohol and tobacco, and even treating PTSD. According to *Science News*, Sanders, L. (2021), “MDMA therapy seemed to have similar effects in an international study of 90 people with PTSD. Two-thirds of those who got MDMA no longer qualified for a PTSD diagnosis at the end of trial, compared with about one-third of participants who received placebos.” These results have all been discovered within the past 85 years, it is limitless to think of what capabilities surround these substances in the future.

Another common myth surrounding psychedelics is that they lead to addiction and can be deadly. The generalization with the word “drug” develops these misconceptions. Although this may be true that psychedelics are “drugs,” psychedelics are not addictive nor deadly, and research shows that psychedelics differ from your typical drug, effecting your brain differently. Gepp (2022) found that psychedelics are not a leading factor to addiction or dependence and as far as deaths go, you are more likely to die being struck by lightning. As stated previously, psychedelics are helpful in treating addictions for alcohol, tobacco, and nicotine, but are not addictive themselves. Stated by professionals at *John Hopkins Medicine*, “U.S. adults with a history of using some nonaddictive psychedelic drugs had reduced likelihood of psychological distress and suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts, according to data from a nationwide survey” (Dewar, H., Hedin, M., Jones, H., 2015). Not only are deaths extremely uncommon related to psychedelics, but they are also helpful regarding suicide, making it less common in those using the drugs.

In a comparable manner, another myth revolved around psychedelics is that they generate an unproductive and lazy user of the drug. Users of these substances get perceived and generalized as someone they are not; however, psychedelics can provide a case of personal development through *micro dosing*, “taking a small portion compared to a normal dose,” and is becoming an extremely modern way to boost creativity and productivity. In the words of *Mind Medicine Australia*, Andrews, E., Dr. Roy, A. (2020), the well-known stigma around psychedelics is usually a lack of perception, lack of awareness, and being unproductive. On the other hand, “Findings show that both LSD (10-20 mcg) and psilocybin (<1-3 mg) have subtle (positive) effects on cognitive processes (time perception, convergent and divergent thinking) and brain regions involved in affective processes” (Kuypers, 2020). Micro dosing has shown

beneficial improvements to mental health and general daily activities. According to *Harvard University*, “In one international survey, 79% of respondents reported improvements in their mental health after micro dosing. In other surveys, participants described experiencing better creativity and productivity, in addition to decreased levels of anxiety and depression” (Grabski 2020).

Finally, the last myth and common stigma held against psychedelics is that they are a party drug. Due to the enhancement of sound, colors, and the intense euphoric feeling, that perception is understandable. However, there are many other beneficial settings and purposes for these drugs other than parties. Over the past two years there have been two players in the NFL, Aaron Rodgers, and Kenny Stills, who have publicly opened up about taking psychedelics. Rodgers received a “deep and meaningful appreciation for life” and claimed his experience is the leading factor for his success the previous year (Hensley, J., 2022). According to *Inside Hook*, “Stills says, ‘I’m not here to tell you to do drugs or to do psychedelics. I’m here to let you know that there are other options out there for you if you want to get help, and to be transparent about my journey and the fact that I have used psychedelics combined with therapy and mindset work to get me to a place where I feel a lot freer and have more empathy and joy in my heart’” (Bleier, E., 2022). There are more beneficial ways to use these drugs rather than to party; there are appropriate camps, retreats, and vacations to thoroughly enjoy and benefit from your experience with psychedelics.

All in all, over the past 85 years, extremely beneficial purposes of psychedelics have been discovered by researchers and scientists. Psychedelics are different from other “drugs” in that they are not addictive or deadly. Psychedelics can boost creativity and productivity rather than creating an unproductive or lazy user, and there are many settings where the substances are used

rather than parties. In the future, I hope psychedelics become a required topic to learn about in school other than psychology and many of the misconceptions could be avoided. Now I cannot change your perception like psychedelics can, but I hope you take this information on the myths vs. facts in a mind changing way. If psychedelics are kept illegal, it will be challenging to determine the truth of what these substances are truly capable of.

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